

FLORIDA INCIDENTS

Battle of the Natural Bridge

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The Battle of Natural Bridge. (By Francis P. Fleming.)

It is somewhat remarkable that, notwithstanding repeated attempts, at no time during the war between the states did the United States forces penetrate and hold any portion of Florida beyond the range of their naval batteries. The most formidable of such attempts was that under General Seymour, which culminated in his signal defeat by General Finegan at Olustee, February 6, 1864. In August, 1864, a Federal cavalry command, about 350 strong, reached Gainesville and was there met, defeated and captured by Capt. J. J. Dickinson with a force of about half that number.

The last attempt to invade the state before the final surrender was made during the early part of March, 1865, by Brigadier General John Newton with a command, which he reports about 1000 strong. I am not prepared to say that such number was incorrect, but it was estimated by the Confederates to be much larger. This expedition landed near St. Marks light house the evening of March 4th and early on morning of the 5th. It was met by Lieutenant Colonel George W. Scott, with five companies of his cavalry battalion and a piece of artillery. After some skirmishing Colonel Scott retired, and being unable to carry off the piece of artillery, its sights were knocked off and it was abandoned and fell into the hands of the enemy. Scott retired across the St. Marks river at New Port, where he partially destroyed the bridge, and from a breastwork on the west side kept up a fire that prevented the enemy from repairing the bridge and crossing at that point. During the afternoon—Sunday the 5th—Scott was reinforced by a company of cadets of the West Florida Seminary at Tallahassee, sixty-five strong, under command of V. M. Johnson, the cadet captain being J. Wesley Wethington.

Learning from scouts that the enemy were following up the river, and apprehending that he would attempt to cross at the "Natural Bridge" where the St. Marks flows underground for some distance, Scott proceeded with most of his cavalry up the river on the west side to that point, reaching there about midnight, and established a picket outpost on the "bridge."

As soon as information of the landing of the enemy near St. Marks reached Major General Sam Jones commanding the Department of Florida, with headquarters at Tallahassee, he issued orders to hasten forward all available troops. In response thereto the First Regiment of Florida Reserves, Colonel J. J. Daniel, and two companies of "Home Guards," consisting of old men and boys, from Quincy and Monticello, and a section of the Kilcrease Artillery under Lieutenant Patrick Houston, all under command of Colonel Daniel, were hurried to the front. The writer, at that time an officer of the First Florida cavalry, of the Army of Tennessee, temporarily on sick leave, joined this force as a volunteer aide to Colonel Daniel. These troops departed from the train on the St. Marks railroad at the "Oil Still" near midnight, and at once marched about seven miles eastward to the Natural Bridge, arriving there at daylight the morning of the 6th, and at once formed line in an open country fronting the wood which covered the natural bridge. Before such formation was completed the cavalry pickets at the front were driven in by the advance of the enemy. The Federals pushed forward in a vigorous attack, which was repulsed. A spirited fire was kept up by both sides for some time. The artillery held a position near the center, supported by the infantry on either side, and the flanks were held by the cavalry. Colonel Daniel was severely injured, being dashed against a tree by his horse, which became unmanageable when the firing commenced. He remained in command, however, until the arrival of Brigadier General Miller, about 9 a. m., who then assumed command. About the same time the company of cadets and Dunham's battery reached the scene of action. A desultory fire was kept up during the morning, and soon after midday the enemy renewed his attack in force, and met by a heavy fire of artillery and small arms, was again repulsed. After this a spirited fire was kept up on both sides. Early in the afternoon the Confederates were further reinforced by several companies of the Second Florida cavalry, dismounted. About 4 p. m., the enemy's fire having ceased, the writer was placed in command of a line of skirmishers, by Lieutenant Colonel Scott, and ordered to move forward and feel the enemy. This was done, passing over the ground he had occupied, where a number of killed and some wounded had been left. Advancing through the hammock and swamp to the open on the other side, a substantial earthwork was found by a force of the enemy. The main line

was then advanced and drove the Federals from this position. Under cover of night the enemy made good his retreat to the coast and embarked on the transports from which he had landed. Our small force of mounted cavalry was insufficient to inflict much damage upon the retreating foe. A detachment of Gwynn's company of Scott's Battalion under Lieutenant Eben Burroughs, following the retreat, came up next morning with a body of twenty-three negro troops under command of a lieutenant, which had become separated from the main command, and after skirmishing with them for some time succeeded in cutting off their retreat and capturing them. Among other captures were two deserters from the Confederate army, who had acted as guides to the Federal troops. These were tried by Drum Head court martial next day, sentenced to death, and shot in the presence of the troops at New Port on the morning of the 8th. General Newton reports his loss at 21 killed, 89 wounded and 38 missing, total 148. The Confederate loss was quite small, 3 killed and 22 wounded, total 25. Among the killed was Captain H. H. Simmons of the Second Florida cavalry, a brave and gallant soldier and efficient officer. Another volunteer in this short campaign, well known to the people of the state, was Captain D. E. Maxwell of the First Florida cavalry, a veteran of the armies of Northern Virginia and Tennessee, who was recovering from a severe wound received at Peachtree Creek near Atlanta. Unable to walk he joined Gwynn's company, mounted, with his crutches tied to his saddle. He served throughout the action and participated in the capture of the detachment above mentioned.

General Newton's reports, found in the government publication "War of the Rebellion," Series I, Vol. 49 Part 1 contain some notable errors. On page 57 he says: "After a fierce fight, resulting in the complete repulse of the enemy, finding that the navy could not ascend the river, I decided to withdraw." In his more detailed report, on page 60 he says: "At daybreak Major Sinclair, with two companies (B and G) of the Second U. S. Colored Infantry, drove the advanced posts of the enemy over the bridge, when his further progress was checked by a superior force of the enemy behind entrenchments." The "advanced posts" referred to were two or three cavalry pickets. This attack was made when the Confederate forces, except Scott's cavalry, had just arrived on the ground and before they had thrown up entrenchments. Again on the same page, referring to the second attack, he says: "Colonel Townsend with his command advanced gallantly, the enemy fleeing on his approach, and abandoning his breastworks, but at the foot almost of the works he encountered a deep slough impassible to troops and the command reluctantly retired." The "enemy fleeing," as reported, was but the falling back of our advanced pickets to the main line; and if General Newton was made to believe that the Confederate breastworks were abandoned his credulity was sadly imposed upon. Neither was there any slough in front of main part of the Confederate lines. Nor is there any foundation in fact, upon which to base his report of "the complete repulse of the enemy." It would appear strange indeed, if General Newton had inflicted a complete repulse upon his enemy, that he would have hurried to his transports, under cover of darkness, leaving his dead unburied and part of his wounded behind, and a detachment which was captured. The Confederate troops were not repulsed in a single instance during the campaign; though it is not denied, that Scott's cavalry fell back before the whole Federal command, of five times its numbers, on their advance after landing, until he could successfully hold them in check after crossing the St. Marks river at New Port.

General Newton was also misinformed and therefore greatly exaggerated the numbers of Confederate troops. At the time of the first attack at the "bridge" they numbered about 800 and after the arrival of the last reinforcements, when the battle was practically over, the entire force could not have exceeded 1200. The 1000, reinforcements from Georgia, mentioned by the General, had no existence in fact.

Throughout the action of the Confederate forces, a considerable number of which had never been under fire before, acted with great gallantry and courage.

Hang on! Cling on! No matter what they say,
Push on! Sing on! Things will come your way,
Sittin' down and whinin' never helps a bit,
Best way to git there is to get up and git.

TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM.

Editor Ocala Banner:

You will take a ruler and place it on a map of Florida at the narrowest of the peninsula you will find the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean on the other while almost in the exact center is the city of Ocala.

Refer to the "scale of miles" and you will find the distance to be ninety-five miles. Take a pencil and mark this line on the map, study it and you will be impressed first that it traverses as a whole an almost virgin or new country, yet we all know that on the west of Ocala it is rich in phosphate and timber and on the east in farming and stock lands.

Start on your penciled line from Cedar Keys and you will see that a railroad built from the gulf to the Atlantic will pass through Gulf Hammock crossing the A. C. L. first at Romeo, hitting the Seaboard at Eagle mines, crossing both again at Ocala, tapping the Ocklawaha a little above Silver Springs, the A. C. L. branch again at Astor, deep water on the St. Johns river at the same place, the A. C. L. main line a few miles further on, then the East Coast line at Daytona across the Halifax to the Atlantic.

Or diverge slightly south, still striking the St. Johns at deep water, run right through bottled up DeLand making for the Atlantic at New Smyrna. Either route would mean the construction of approximately 100 miles of railway.

It would be impossible to estimate the value of such a line of railway to the entire Florida peninsula, especially to the territory and the towns along its line and most especially to the city of Ocala.

What would it mean? A line of boats to Mobile or Pensacola or New Orleans or all three and direct connections with the great west, again, direct connection at the Ocklawaha with that river's trade (capable of great development) and still again the St. Johns where the Clyde or other lines give us water transportation to the eastern and European ports and not least tapping the East Coast securing southern and giving them western connections.

Could such road be built? Yes, by the development of public sentiment among the people whom it would most likely benefit. Bottled up Cedar Keys would give half her assessed valuation for such a road, the owners of phosphate and timber properties would do their share, Ocala would and should, if the road is built, lead all others, the large and the small farmer and stock man would naturally help. Bottled up DeLand would dive deep in her pockets, the Clyde on the St. Johns would welcome this accession to their territory, and what wouldn't Mr. Flagler do for a straight line from his road to the Gulf while the people of Daytona and Seabreeze, which would be made the greatest all the year resort on the Atlantic coast, would divide their wealth with the road builders. And this is the barest outline of the interests involved.

And don't believe there isn't sufficient water at Cedar Keys for practical purposes even now. Just look at the government charts and see that it would not be a difficult matter to secure what depths is needed for present purposes.

Would such a road pay? Yes, and No. Yes if the method of the modern railroad constructor like Hill in the west and Flagler in Florida is followed and systematic and intelligent effort is made to develop the actual resources of the country through which the road passes. No, if the ancient history is followed that "there is just so much business and we are going to get it anyhow." A railroad man said some years ago that railroad was an exact science. Judging from very recent developments here it seems to be a very considerably inexact one. The road that is here suggested should be the best paying one in the south and absolutely independent of rail connections. What other hundred mile road would touch both the Atlantic and the Gulf and in doing so would cross three navigable rivers and incidentally tap other roads exactly eight times. This road ought to haul enough coal down to the East Coast, where they have more money than wood to burn, to pay its fixed charges. And it ought to be built a long time before the Isthmian canal is completed. This by way of parenthesis.

Ocala? It would make Ocala more than the Atlanta of Florida. It would give her the key to the situation. She would no longer have to plead for justice but be in a position to demand it. She must inaugurate the movement and carry it on to its successful completion. It can be done. It can be done here. But there must be a start made. How? The Ocala board of trade, through working committees should immediately place itself in touch with the boards of trade of Pensacola, of Mobile, of New Orleans, with the people of Cedar Keys and on to Seabreeze, with Mr. Flagler, and the Clydes. The subject

should be agitated and discussed. That will cost nothing. Each newspaper along the line will take it up.

The project is feasible, it is simple and as severely practical as the addition of 2 and 2. There is and there is a community that will discourage every movement of progress and object to every enterprise from the laying of a few feet of sewer pipe to the construction of a railroad. And these necessarily crude suggestions will meet on this hand the common fate. But is it not worth investigation? Let these pessimistic prophets go. They remind one of this story told by a distinguished Floridian. It has a moral. The story goes that a man suffering with a severe sore throat had a doctor prepare an asafetida poultice and place it around his neck. Returning to his home he was met by his little boy who on getting one good whiff of the malodorous stuff burst into tears and ran yelling into the house. "Ma, oh, ma, Pa's dead and don't know it!"

—B.

Christian Endeavor Movements.

A report from President F. E. Clark, D. D., president of the world's Christian Endeavor Union, sent from Stockholm, states that he has held very large Christian Endeavor meetings both in Christiana and Stockholm. In the former city King Haakon gave him permission to speak in the Cathedral on Christian Endeavor, for he only can grant foreigners permission to speak in the Dom. There was a very large audience, including the Bishop of Norway and many of the clergy, and much interest was manifested, hundreds standing in the aisles throughout the service.

In Stockholm there were many meetings in the interest of Christian Endeavor, the largest being in Waldenstrom's church, which is said to seat 4,000 and which was full. Prince Oscar Barnodette, second son of King Oscar of Sweden, an earnest Christian man, had been invited to attend the Christian Endeavor meeting in Geneva. It is hoped that he may attend.

A report from Secretary Stanley J. Edwards, Paris, of the committee of Christian Endeavor in Europe, states that the main body of French Protestantism is Presbyterian, under the direction of a central synod, and Christian Endeavor has been brought time after time to the attention of these synods. Finally the synods have voted in favor of Christian Endeavor, and that the fiat has gone forth that they approve of such work, and recommend its general adoption by the local churches and congregations.

Christian Endeavor in France is going steadily forward, till it has attained 22 societies with 2,654 members; but it is uphill work, as is all evangelical work in France.

What One Man is Doing.

The Flagler road is giving employment to over 4,000 workmen on the Key West extension. This extension is and will forever be the most wonderful railroad building in the history of Florida. What a wonderful transformation Henry M. Flagler has made of the East Coast of the state from Jacksonville to Key West at an expenditure probably of \$50,000,000! He has been the state's greatest developer and benefactor, for he will hardly see the day when a profit will come from his vast investments. Many thousands of our own people have followed the opening up of this beautiful and fertile country for settlement, and many are getting rich by the opportunities given in the investment of these millions in our state. Such investments are what make a state great and prosperous. Just see what will be shipped from the fruit and trucking sections down the East Coast this season. The vegetable output is estimated at nearly half a million crates, and the pineapple crop will foot up nearly as much. There are growers, some from Volusia county, who will make a fortune this season. And still you hear of fanatics and anti-corporationists fighting Flagler and his enterprises. Proper guards should be thrown around the operations of railroads as are given the people in the Railroad Commission, but this continual foaming at the mouth by fanatics about railroad corporations does the state and her people great harm. It is the method such people adopt to get office. It is the office they are after, and not for the real interests of the state or the people.—Volusia County Record.

On the front page of Tom Watson's magazine is a picture of Hon. Hoke Smith, of Georgia. Tom is taking a great interest in Hoke's election notwithstanding he was a member of Cleveland's cabinet. Tom's manifest interest in Hoke's election ought to be taken with an allowance of salt. Tom's support ought to help the other fellow.

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